

# THE OBJECTS OF MASONRY

Has Freemasonry any specific objects? According to some people it has - very definite ones. Among them we may note the destruction of all religion and overturning of every government, the establishment of a state of anarchy and the downfall of civilization and the final triumph of the powers of hell and the kingdom of Satan. For further details, General Ludendorff, Leo Taxil, Col. Gustav Wolf, Mrs. Nesta Webster and many others may be referred to. But setting aside the assertions of our friends the enemy, who may or may not believe what they say, has Masonry any objective aim or purpose as a reason for its existence?

One of our contemporaries has raised the question and has answered it by saying that "*Freemasonry has always existed for its own sake*" and that a man "*becomes a Mason in order to be a Mason.*"

While it is perfectly true that the Fraternity does not exist for the purpose of furthering any specific cause, whether religious, political or charitable, yet is it, as an institution, entirely self-centered? It certainly was not instituted, nor do men become Masons, in order to further the cause of universal education in a particular country, or universal peace between all nations or any such aim or purpose; but is it true that it has no interest in the welfare of humanity? That universal benevolence is a characteristic of every true Mason has always been understood; that a society of men individually benevolent may not exercise benevolence collectively is paradoxical indeed.

Let us recall a question that most American Masons will remember:

Do you seriously declare ... that you are prompted to solicit the privilege of Masonry by ... a sincere wish of being serviceable to your fellow creatures?

Consider too the old charge at the closing of the lodge. After rehearsing the duties and obligations Masons specifically owe to each other it is said:

These generous principles are to extend farther. Every human being has a claim upon your kind offices. "Do good unto all."

And again:

... by liberal benevolence and diffusive charity; by constancy and fidelity in your friendships, discovered the beneficial and happy effects of this ancient and honorable institution.

In the instructions given to the Apprentice it is stated that the tenets of a Mason's profession are brotherly love, relief and truth, and we are told that:

By the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family; the high and low, the rich and poor, who as, created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support and protect each other .....

This statement is remarkable in that it is said that it is by the exercise of brotherly love that we come to know these things.

Under the head of relief it is said:

To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent upon all men, but particularly on Masons, who are linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affections. To soothe the unhappy; to sympathize with their misfortunes; to compassionate their miseries and to restore peace to their troubled minds, is the great aim we have in view.

It is highly probable that many who hear these words assume without much thought that they apply only within the limits of the Fraternity. But this was not the original intention. This passage in our Monitors appeared first in Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* in a context which shows conclusively it was intended as of universal application. Preston says:

The bounds of the greatest nation or the most extensive empire cannot circumscribe the generosity of a liberal mind.... A mutual chain of dependence subsists throughout the animal creation. All of the human species are, therefore, proper objects for the exercise of charity.

The next section to that in which this appears is headed "The Discernment displayed by Masons in the choice of objects of charity," and it contains some very excellent remarks on the subject of the relief of the poor and needy and it is concluded thus:

From this view of the advantages which result from the practice and profession of Masonry, every candid and impartial mind must acknowledge its utility and importance to the state; and surely, if the picture here drawn be just, it must be no trifling acquisition to any government to have under its jurisdiction a society of men, who are, not only true patriots and loyal subjects, but the patrons of science and the friends of mankind.

This was the conception of Masonry that was held by the intellectual leaders of the Craft when our ritual was still in a formative state, and there could be collected a multitude of instances to show that it was accepted and put into practice. Not perfectly, not universally, yet there is no doubt that it was held to be a proper activity for Masons, both individually and collectively. The idea that Masonic lodges should be restricted to self-centered objects is of quite recent appearance, and the positive prohibition of external benevolence is to be found only in the United States, and fortunately, not yet in very many of our jurisdictions.

A study of the ritual will show, once the language used is appreciated in its full meaning and in all its implications, that a Mason's duty and obligation is first to those to whom he is bound by natural ties, second to those to whom he is bound by the voluntary ties of the Fraternity, the duty to whom includes also all who are united by natural ties to each member, that is those who are dependent on him; and finally to all mankind.

What any one can do to help others is limited, often very limited. But the limits are set, or should be set, only by external circumstances and not by a self-centered view. Priority of claims comes properly into effect only when claims clash. That we are unable to aid a brother because of some material obstacle is no reason why we should not help our neighbor whose need is at our door.

No man lives to himself alone, and the same is true of institutions. To become self-centred is the beginning of moral deterioration - and on that road finally lies dissolution and death. It was said once "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What shall it profit the

Craft if it counts its adherents by millions, and has unlimited wealth and power, if it has forgotten the law of its being? It may be true that the average Mason has never thought much of these things, and it may not be his fault, but it is a condition that should not be acquiesced in, or regarded as normal and proper. Though in truth the problem of amending it seems almost hopeless. Probably those who see it had best begin by looking for what needs to be reformed in themselves. For it is in the practice of moral and social virtues that we learn.

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